MASTER
NEGATIVE
NO. 91-80415-4

MICROFILMED 1991

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES/NEW YORK

as part of the
"Foundations of Western Civilization Preservation Project"

Funded by the
NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

Reproductions may not be made without permission from
Columbia University Library

COPYRIGHT STATEMENT

The copyright law of the United States -- Title 17, United States Code -- concerns the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material...

Columbia University Library reserves the right to refuse to accept a copy order if, in its judgement, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of the copyright law.

AUTHOR: MCMILLAN, MARGARET

TITLE: THE MISSION OF CHILDREN.

PLACE: [LONDON]

DATE: [191-?]

Master Negative #
91-80415-4

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES
PRESERVATION DEPARTMENT

BIBLIOGRAPHIC MICROFORM TARGET

Original Material as Filmed - Existing Bibliographic Record

170
Z1
v.3

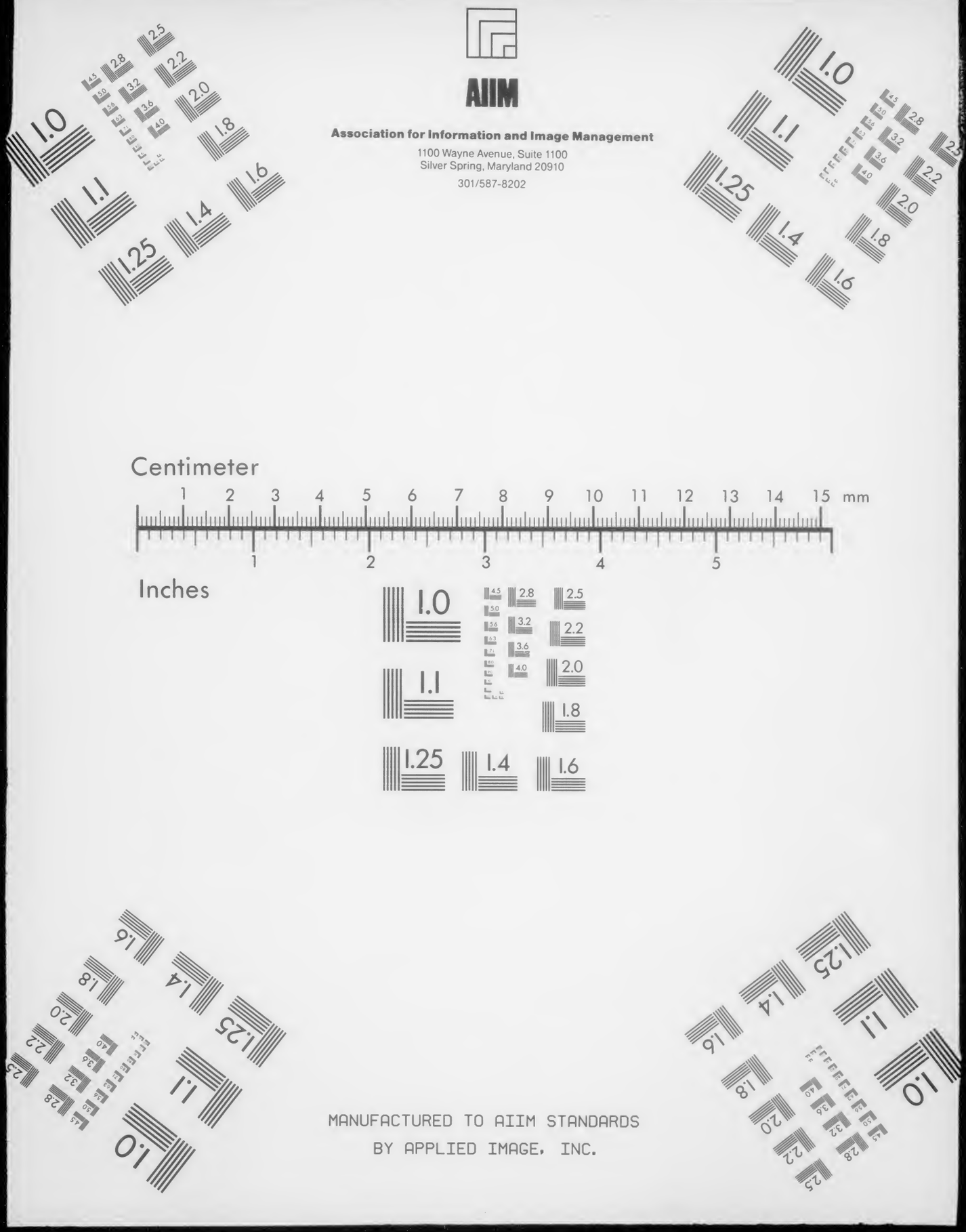
McMillan, Margaret, 1860-1931.
The mission of children, by Margaret McMillan.
[London, Union of ethical societies, 191-?]
16 p. 18 cm in 22 cm. (Ethical essays. no. 8)

Caption title. Volume of pamphlets

Restrictions on Use:

TECHNICAL MICROFORM DATA

FILM SIZE: 35 mm REDUCTION RATIO: 11X
IMAGE PLACEMENT: IA (IIA) IB IIB
DATE FILMED: 1/9/92 INITIALS G.G.
FILMED BY: RESEARCH PUBLICATIONS, INC WOODBRIDGE, CT


AIIM
Association for Information and Image Management
1100 Wayne Avenue, Suite 1100
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910
301/587-8202
Centimeter
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 mm
Inches
1 2 3 4 5
MANUFACTURED TO AIIM STANDARDS
BY APPLIED IMAGE, INC.

No. 4

Ethical Essays. ONE PENNY. No. 8.

THE

MISSION OF CHILDREN

By MARGARET McMILLAN

No one can read the educational books and references of a hundred years ago without being struck by the fact that our forebears looked upon childhood as a stage of life which must be hurried over as quickly as possible. One learned writer speaks of his four-year-old son as a "youth," and another of his little daughter of ten as a "young woman." The little ones were always confronted by grown-up people in a hurry, who said of childhood, "Would it were over!" Mr. Dombey, looking courageously down at the tiny figure of the six-year-old Paul, repeated, "We are getting on," like a man singing to himself in a dark, long road to keep his spirits up. You can hear the same note of patient impatience in the talk of many fathers to-day. True, we are not quite so intolerant of childhood as a State. We have learned that we must put up with it, and even—as the race progresses—see its term prolonged. But our attitude to children, if no longer intolerant, is still pedantic. It is still the attitude of persons who have much to teach—and little, or perhaps nothing, to learn.

And yet childhood has its own beauty, its own wisdom, its own mission. "The dawn," said the Greeks, "is like the rose." Childhood is not like one flower, but like the spring-time, when flowers appear on the earth, and hold the promise of achievement and fulfilment in frail, lovely forms. "Ornamentation precedes dress," said Spencer. And we may add, Goodness succeeds beauty; work succeeds play. In all the lands where childhood is allowed a reasonable amount of freedom, and is not chilled or paralysed by contact with harsh pedantry, children take to their own work and fulfil their own mission with extraordinary promptitude and decision. Children's little hands make the

greater part of the pretty, fantastic jewellery of Eastern nations. Southern children conceive as well as execute new patterns and designs—gay patterns, grotesque designs in pottery, jewellery, and embroidery, fanciful, naïve, inimitable! Merry little Spaniards play with a variety of plastic materials, pick up the elements of design, and turn out pretty ornaments that find a ready market in other lands. So much for the children of the East and of the South. Are the children of the West very different? For a long time it was believed, perhaps, that childhood could be dispensed with by the colder nations of the North and West. But no. Childhood is always a blossoming-time—a time of beauty for itself alone. Not only Ravaisson and Guyau in France, Herbart and Froebel in Germany, Tolstoi in Russia, but the American Leland, and Rutyers Marshall, Ablett, and others in England, all testify in various ways to the existence of an art instinct, by means of which childhood transforms all that is offered to it, and finds its own mental and moral expression. Appeal to this instinct, and lo! the little ones will decorate your home! They will put a glad writing of youth on all your common objects, embroider your rude fabrics,[1] fill your home with music and sunshine. A little *wise* help, a little true guidance, and in some minor arts they will excel their elders. For children's fingers have some secrets that are lost in later days. But any thwarting now or denial will, of course, mean future loss. The apple blossoms are only blossoms, and yet, if ill befalls them, there will be no fruit. So the children carry everywhere not only the promise, but the warning of spring.

"You shall have beauty to-day. But if you love it not, and respect it not, there will be no harvest, no utility, to-morrow."

Fortunately, the childhood of the race is not so thwarted and imposed upon as is the childhood of the individual. Otherwise no development would have been possible. The

[1] If you go into any infant school to-day, you may see little children stitching on a square of cotton. They are learning to hem! They do not want to learn to hem. They might enjoy drawing bold curves and stitching over these in bright colours. And their instinct is quite true. The hemming is a waste of time in so far as they are concerned. If they *must* learn sewing, let them approach it through the door of decorative, not *useful*, work.

harshest teachers, the most severe, are schoolboys—older children. In America teachers appoint judges and magistrates from the school benches to rule the school and punish offenders; but they have to overrule judgments and punishments, because the young persons in authority are so very severe. And so the fathers and mothers of an earlier generation than ours were very stern with their little ones. Fortunately, the race has no duenna or schoolmaster in perpetuity, coercing it so that the very spirit of it is overruled and suppressed. No harsh teacher stood by the side of the ancient Greek bidding him restrain the child-spirit that sought expression in art.[1] The Greek theatre was developed from the stone-paved circles where the village dances took place. First there was joy—the joy of children and young maidens. From this root sprang the great art of the Athenians.

The fancy of the Middle Ages was wayward—free, not troubled by any serious interference from utilitarian considerations. "The idea of laying out a city on a deliberate plan was not yet realised by the mediæval artist," writes Lethaby. And yet the mediæval art has a beauty all its own—gives *a joy different in kind* from the intellectual pleasure which is the gift of a riper civilisation. This joy, different in kind from the pleasures of older, more sophisticated beings, was the joy of children. The people still sang as the birds sing, decorated their homes, arrayed their persons, and painted their missals in gay colours. This is a pleasant hour in the industrial day of a race. Work is not all play. It is already true work; but the child-spirit is not banished from it. And the value of such life and labour is not for one generation, but for all generations. Thus do the young in heart and mind grow and develop; thus does their imagination exercise itself; thus does the unconscious preparation of the mind for new modes of thought and a new version of life proceed. No harsh duenna is near to cry, "Stop all these vanities. Reason *at*

[1] To-day our slum children dance at dingy street corners to the strains of a barrel-organ. The joy of youth is not quite repressed—it is still in them as a possible root of goodness. But it is almost impossible to persuade the level-headed man that dancing should have a place in schools. He is quite sure that it is all nonsense.

once, as men will reason in the twentieth century." No. The people are still children : they work and learn and live as children. And what would our world of to-day be if these had never been? Not only did they make possible the life and work of to-day; they left us their own bright heritage, Beauty—undying lights of dawn and airs of Spring. "It is of no use to try and make our art and our knowledge modern," says Blomfield; "in doing so we only make it vulgar. We must search again for tradition." What is the searching for "tradition" but a looking for the spirit and form of youth? We must return and try to learn something from those who lived in an earlier season and possessed something that we (with all our progress) have lost. We cannot play as they played, even at war, romantically, or trade as they traded, artistically, or fall into gay processions or build fairy architecture. But we *can* love Beauty and reverence Childhood, and feel that our life is imperfect if we lose touch with its powers and ministry.

Nevertheless, it appears that the effort to keep in touch with tradition is not always, or even often, successful. The modern world is a busy world, much absorbed with the present. Moreover, as becomes men and women who have put away childish things, our aims are utilitarian. We value good work and even love it—there our power and appreciation usually end. T. J. Cobden Saunderson writes as follows of an Arts and Crafts Exhibition to which he was invited as judge : "I found, taking the exhibition as a whole, that, so far as they were traditional and plain, the things of pure utility were well and suitably conceived and made, and even in some cases delightful to see and to handle; but that *the things so-called of beauty were for the most part not beautiful at all*, and that many things which would have been fit and useful had they been let alone were spoilt by ornament —ornament, indeed, had lost all sanity." This judgment is echoed by many artists and craftsmen who survey our efforts at decoration and ornament. Long ago the people were sane in art, expressed the best that was in them in fair and fine decoration, and did not divorce the beautiful from the useful. Now all this is changed, and so depressing is this change that the artist and craftsman cannot reconcile himself to it. He is impelled to offer a suggestion for the revival of the spirit of beauty in the heart of the manual worker. Thus

Mr. Cobden Saunderson no sooner returned home than he began to think of reviving in some form the old guilds whose main object was the securing of good work, and the giving of mutual instruction, "not for private advantage, but for the reputation and good of the trades"! This idea, however, had occurred to other artists. John Ruskin, for example, had already written on the need of opening schools where "specific art-teaching would be given to operatives in the various trades." By means of instruction, lectures, the building and furnishing of guild halls, and intercourse with the best craftsmen, the spirit of beauty was to be kindled anew in the hearts of the workers.

There is one grim fact, however, that seems to lie like a rock in front of all crafts and arts reformers. It is this—the majority of the workers are to-day engaged, not in crafts, but in labour that is, strictly speaking, neither mental nor manual, but mechanical. This thought doubtless flashed in on Mr. Saunderson, for he proceeds to examine the case of a worker whose business in life is far enough removed from his own beautiful craft of bookbinding. How was the miner to profit by a guild? What could a guild do for *him?* It could do certain things of great value and importance. It might supply him, as Mr. Saunderson suggests, with a museum containing tools, models of machinery, maps of mining regions in distant parts of the world by means of which the miner could see how his trade was no local thing, but a world-wide industry, and his comrades a great brotherhood hailing from every clime. Now, there is ample evidence to show that miners respond to the efforts of the geologist. The men of the pits in the northern counties heard the scientists gladly who, thirty and forty years ago, went to them. Their attitude and interest in lectures on scientific subjects drew a tribute, as we all know, from one of the finest thinkers of that day. There is no reason to doubt, therefore, that guilds, extension lectures, museums, etc., might enlarge the miner's horizon, and thus help to brighten it. Would it restore to him the spirit of beauty, of sane art, of joy? Alas! I fear it would do nothing of the kind. Art and sanity of art and joy in labour must depend on the nature and possibilities of the work itself in which a man or woman engages. All art is joy—joy not in life only, but in *work*.

And what *is* a miner's work. In the gloom underground he labours where the sunlight never falls. There doubtless it may happen that he catches a glimpse of a long-dead world, a long-vanished time when the mountains had no spectators. But as a rule the work is hard, *painful* even at times, and mechanical. Zola's description of it in one of his novels is not exaggerated. In the close neighbourhood of deadly gases, exposed to danger that science can mitigate but not avert, the coal is dug out and lifted to the surface. Such work does not give any exercise to the play-instinct, which is the art-instinct. It is grim. And what is true of the miner's work is true also of innumerable other trades. The toil of factory hands, of smelters, of glass-blowers and furnace tenders, of navvies, of fishermen, not to mention any revolting and yet apparently necessary trades, admits perhaps of the possession of ideals on the part of the workers, but hardly of pride, pleasure, and joy in the nature and perfecting of the work itself.

Even when we consider the trades that involve a great activity of the imagination and reason, the worker lives in a graver atmosphere than our fathers knew. Modern development has proceeded along the lines of science and mechanics. There is no reason to share the artist's revolt against machinery. Inventions in mechanics are beyond question the result of the activity and education of faculties of the highest order. The aim of the inventor, as of the scientist, is bolder than was that of the bravest worker of the Middle Ages. He has to deal continually with natural forces that visit error with death. A real work of art can only arise in the soul of an artist as the fruit of the life he has lived. And a great invention, too, such as the power-loom or the steam-engine, represents the travail of a human soul. But the later-born is a sadder kind of progeny. The parent takes pride and pleasure in it, but it is not—as were the temple and missal of a bygone age—a thing of joy for all, and free to all. To the inventor, indeed, it may give joy, and to others trained to appreciate the value of this high product. But to the majority it is first a utility, but also a possible rival, or even a menace. The factory workers of the earlier part of the last century broke the looms, smashed machinery. Now they are more self-controlled, but not less helpless. The new machine is still a new way

of displacing and dispensing with human labour. The Life of Society is certainly animated very largely to-day by fear. Thousands are afraid—and with good reason—of the triumphs of the inventor. An element not merely of seriousness, but of misgiving, has found its way into our lives. Not the "workers" alone live in the shadow. The thinkers, the inventors, even the millionaires, have each their own peculiar anxieties founded on a consciousness of the lessening number of things that can be shared in common. And this state of half-suppressed fear and misgiving checks imagination, drains the energies, and weakens the highest powers of the mind. All suffer more or less, but the burden falls heaviest, and the loss of natural stimulus has the bitterest effect, on the millions who work for a bare living wage, and whose life is one long round of monotonous toil.

* * * * *

We cannot make life a May-game to grown-up persons. We cannot convert stern, grim, dangerous toil into a beautiful craft! Ruskin recoiled before the furnace, and his advice to the men who worked near it was simply: "Quit this place. Nothing lovely will live or blossom here."

Nevertheless, men and women have to remain near the furnace, in the factory, in the mine, in the chain-making shed, and by the fish-gutter's farline.[1] Is life, then, to be shorn for them of some of the elements that constitute it human? No. The saviours are not far to seek. They are in the streets, in the homes, in the school. "Come to me, O ye children," sang Longfellow, relieved from perplexing questions by the sweetness of their voices.

> "Ye open the eastern windows
> That look towards the sun,
> Where thoughts are singing swallows
> And the brooks of morning run."

To thousands of readers such words may have appeared to be merely a poetic utterance, pretty but meaningless. The poet, however, goes on to describe the children's mission in accurate detail, almost like a naturalist:—

> "What the leaves are to the forest
> With light and air for food,

[1] The farline is a trough round which the fish-cleaners work.

Ere their sweet and tender juices
Have been hardened into wood—
That to the world are children;
Through *them* it feels the glow
Of a brighter and sunnier climate
Than reaches the trunks below."

They, the children, feel the glow of a sunnier climate through various favouring circumstances. First and foremost because they *are* children, and in the sweet o' life's year, but also because they are exempt in most civilised countries, at least in the earlier years, from the necessity of engaging in the rudest, hardest work. In no age was this privilege considered other than a necessity for those who brought pleasure and joy into social life. The free Greek citizen spent his abundant leisure and energy in public work, politics, and the study of philosophy. He wanted art also, or rather the *results* of art; but he did not interfere with it himself. He left the artist to his own work, held him exempt from engaging in the more serious occupation of the State. In later days artists were treated with indulgence.[1] Even to-day they are the spoilt darlings of Society, receiving a fortune for a song, a revenue for a picture; and William Morris writes of them as of children who know their own privileges. "The people should provide for them that appreciative audience, and that peaceful beautiful environment to which they (the artists) think they have a right." To children, the "living poems," mankind has not been quite so indulgent. It is not very long since these were crushed in the wine-press of factory labour. Nevertheless, to-day, though heavy burdens are still bound on little shoulders, there is a growing disposition to treat *them* as artists, to let them work in their own way, to let them play! Nay, there is a kind of recognition that this gay work of little ones is the root, and the only root, of all beautiful, noble human work. Children's drama and play were the root of Greek drama. The improvement of English drama can be assured only when we begin to gather English children out

[1] Kings and rulers have certainly done their share in indulging or even spoiling them. Thus when Hans Holbein threw an English Count who had offended down stairs, and the latter complained to the King, Henry VIII. merely said, "I can make ten counts when I please, but I cannot replace a Holbein. Let him do as he pleases."

of the gutter and give them better dancing place. The child's impulse to re-produce, imitate, and finally create, which is expressed in forms of play, is still the same impulse to which we owe all the finer as well as the industrial arts. And this impulse is born anew in every child. The impulse to that order of activity which will tend at last to make even the satisfaction of daily needs an occasion for the expansion of the highest faculties is born in the child of poverty and squalor. His parents have lost that spontaneous art impulse. The language of human feeling is lost to them. They cannot find it in their work any more; but he can restore it to them. He has not lost it yet.

Meanwhile his parents' woeful state awakens the solicitude, not only of craftsmen and social reformers, but even of Governments. It is recognised that the art impulse and its activity and gratification are an essential part of human life; that the language or expression of human feeling cannot be lost with impunity. Indeed, there is a note of alarm in the haste with which legislators and philanthropists have insisted of late in introducing "the old masters" to the masses. Yet all the efforts of modern Governments to popularise art, and thus humanise the people, have been unavailing. The picture gallery does not compete at all with the public-house or gin palace as a centre of attraction; and though, indeed, music halls and places of entertainment abound in the lowest quarters, yet thinkers and writers, such as Mahaffy, see in them only an appalling illustration of the distance which separates the classes from the masses. Such art is worse than no art, and yet any higher art is not to be introduced to the people by the superior classes. How should they learn the language of feeling from strangers? It is not to be hoped for. And there would be little hope for the thousands who have to spend their days in hard, monotonous toil if they had not the true restorers of art and human feeling in their own homes, at their own hearth, in the persons of their own children!

Is it enough, then, that the art impulse is born with almost every child? Does this in itself ensure the child's development and the parents' restoration? We know that it is not enough—that the mere inheritance of the art impulse ensures nothing. Nearly every child is born with the capacity for learning to speak, and yet children who never hear

human speech do not express their thoughts in words. In order that they may do so, they must grow up in surroundings which allow of their hearing human speech. Given the stimulus of example and the material for imitation, the little ones learn to speak. The language may be a very difficult one (such, for example, as the Gaelic of the Highlanders). The little ones learn it all the same, just as rapidly as do the children whose mother tongue is a very easy one. But if children hear no language, or but a very poor fragmentary dialect spoken, they will, of course, speak little or not at all. The impulse to action is, as Fichte said, the most original thing in the world; but a child must have something in the shape of material to act upon. Thus, if he is born in a gloomy and squalid environment which he can never quit, it is hopeless to look for any keen activity in him of the sense of colour or form. If he hears nothing from infancy more harmonious than the hoarse shouting of half-tipsy men, or the shrill cries of angry women, there is little likelihood that he will find an outlet for his art impulse in music. And if his eyes are never allowed to rest on any beautiful object, it is vain to look to him for the joyful expression of life natural to people and children whose commonest utensils, lamps, pots and pans, chairs, stools, etc., were all designed with singular grace and elegance.

"All this is merely a prelude to saying that we must have more expensive schools," the practical man may cry. But, indeed, I am far, at this stage, from advocating the elaborate decoration of class-rooms. A few beautiful objects (these are not necessarily expensive) every school, but especially the slum school, should possess. These form a point of departure and also a point of return for all the scholars. Flowers, a prism, a few pieces of statuary, and a few (not many) pictures, mural and decorative—these are enough to start with.

But the great and important thing in the schoolroom is to have the right kind of teacher. He is the magician who may nobly supply the lack even of the decorator. On him much depended in olden days, when children had to behave like grown-up people. On him even more depends to-day, when we are beginning slowly to see that the best we can hope or expect from the young is that they should fulfil their mission as children.

Without presuming to offer any criticism of the training given to elementary teachers, we may glance here at the more notable successes attained by some of them. These successes are of an unexpected character. In Bradford I was struck by one fact: that the children responded quickly and fully to the influence of the highest art training possible to, or attainable by, them. The singing, for example, always rose, as if by magic, to the level of the teacher. Babies learned to sing correctly, beautifully, without any great apparent effort, much as they learned to speak, taking the right model quite as easily as the wrong one. French and English plays were acted by the Higher Grade girls, every one of whom appeared to be quite ready to become a good actress if only the preliminary teaching and guidance were provided. This ready response and efficiency were almost disconcerting. One did not exactly know what to make of it. In his autobiography Kropotkin suggests that all our pantomimes, charades, etc., are but a *pis aller* for children; that he himself, at the age of eight, could appreciate the best *artiste* of the day, and could not enjoy the performance of any of the inferior performers. All that I have seen of the children of the people goes to prove that this is true not only of the exceptional child, but of average children, and that they can appreciate and get inspiration from *the best.* In pictorial and plastic art the successes of some courageous teachers of young children point to the same conclusion. Even where the aim and preparation of the teacher are by no means ambitious, the response is astonishing! In his interesting book, *Practical Education*, Mr. Leland affirms that "any teacher who can draw a little can prepare children for the minor industrial arts and design." I think it would be a very undesirable thing that elementary teachers should accept this pronouncement. Rapid and sure progress depends everywhere, but more especially in art training, on good and patient preparation. An untrained teacher can never take the large views, can never have the power of selection, the insight, and sympathy of the highly trained. But putting aside the grave question of the teacher's training for the moment, we may well pause in wonder over the achievements of even some bold masters who have fared forth and learned by experience. For the pupils appear to

have responded everywhere in a wonderful degree to methods (whatever the degree of efficiency) which recognise the impulse towards free expression. Mr. Leland (who, I believe, is himself a trained artist) has met with striking success.

Moreover, the children do not take their own achievements too seriously. It is the visitor, the dazzled parent, the dubious practical man, the astonished lady sight-seer, who, taking up a panel, or gazing on a book-cover, exclaims: "But the child who did this is a genius! This is extraordinary." The children themselves know that it is not extraordinary. The children know very well that this is not something wonderful they have done, that all is natural and necessary, and that others can do it quite as well as they! Something that is not the result of modesty, but of a kind of natural knowledge or apprehension, helps them to escape from the result of injudicious praise. Just as a little child is proud, for a moment, when he learns to go alone, but soon loses this feeling when he runs about with others and is occupied with new matters, so older children, educated naturally, rarely suffer from self-conceit. Not only in their achievements, but also in their manner of achieving, there is a sportiveness which never threatens the quality of their work, or even its seriousness. The most serious work of the child is playful, a fact which the modern critics of Froebel are oblivious of. Just as the Greek's religion was associated with art, and his art with sport, so all the serious work of the child is associated with art, and his art with play.

"But," it may be asked, "what of the serious subjects—history, mathematics, etc.? Are they to be taught as mere arts? And will children respond to this order of art teaching?" The answer reaching us from the authoritative quarters is "Yes." Mathematical problems lose all their tediousness and much of their difficulty when in the solution of them one or more arts are employed. Thus, for example, in curve-tracing, many easily come to understand how, through "the alternation of tendencies, the conflict of forces, physical nature and evolution are alike worked out." There are elementary classes now of young children who are tracing curves, and observing their evolution with no sense of mystery in the whole matter, and whose minds are being

prepared for the study of advanced geometry and higher mathematics quite unconsciously to the playing owners. I am not, however, going to enlarge on the preparation for science teaching here. That can be done, is being done, by others. I want to show, rather, how the pursuit of what may be called the more obvious arts by young children can be used for the uplifting and restoration of all the grown-up persons who are weary, saddened, depressed, and, it may be, even de-humanised, by the influences of a life of hard and uninteresting labour.

To begin with, the children may take specimens of their own work home. Not only drawings, but useful, ornamented things, common objects, books, bellows, even pots and pans, made beautiful. "What," someone may cry, mindful of touched-up drawing sand shaky illuminated lettering; "but such work will not be beautiful." It is the aim of this essay to show that, given the right kind of school atmosphere and teaching, children's work *ought* to be beautiful. The testimony of great living artists, such as Watts, for example, as well as that of our own eyes, should go far to convince us that children have a natural facility for portraying movement which is lost in later years. The old Greek vases often show us rushing figures with tossed drapery. Nowhere have I seen such movement save in the drawings of young children. Given good models, atmosphere, and guidance, why should they continue to produce worthless things? They have brought home in the past, perhaps, only stilted copies, poor, dead drawings, valueless things; but such barrenness is no longer necessary. It was never necessary, or natural.

But now let us come a little nearer home. Art, all art, unites people. But there are arts that speak a more intimate language than others, and of these the first and greatest is music. In our elementary schools singing is taught, and in some of them it is very well taught. It happens—very rarely I admit; still, it happens sometimes—that a great diva strays into one of these schools and listens to the children singing. "Ah! Why did I not know that they sing like this?" said one to me, with eyes full of tears and admiration. "Why doesn't everyone know that children sing so beautifully?" I do not know why parents, artists, administrators, hardly guess that children sing beautifully, and that this singing of theirs is unlike everything

that you hear at concerts, or where adult choirs perform. But I think that, if they but heard this singing, sometimes they might come in time to love it, to understand it. Simple music is powerful music. The trained voices of children have a charm and power of invoking feeling which is not to be explained on the ground of mere technical perfection. The moral effects of music, as of other arts, are powerfully felt only while it remains simple and before the pursuit of perfection and the mastery of technical difficulties become ends in themselves. The more energy we are called on to spend in one kind of reaction, the less can we expend on another. Thus simple music has great power over us, exciting memories that are attached to all the great experiences of life. In the trained singing of children we have a simple kind of language, which is perhaps more adapted than any other to reach the heart and deepen the consciousness.

I think that school concerts should be given at regular intervals in elementary schools. The halls should be decorated and lighted well, and comfortable sitting accommodation provided for the audience. Sometimes this kind of entertainment might be varied by a dramatic performance, or (where baths exist) by swimming matches, water sports, etc. In summer open-air entertainments might be given by school-children, and, where possible, the co-operation of great artistes might be solicited. These have hitherto been treated too much as mere spoilt children, whose art can contribute only in the showiest and least enduring forms to the happiness of their age. Why should the great artist be assumed in every case to be an indifferent citizen, whose services cannot be utilised by public bodies, whose influence cannot be directly felt by those who, of all others, have the strongest claims on them—to wit, the children of the working people? To make such an assumption is to insult the good and gifted men who have willingly come forward of late years to assist the administrators of the Education Acts who appealed to them. Social adulation, large emoluments, do not, after all, represent the highest and sincerest kind of praise. Appeal and confidence, a share of civic and national responsibility—these are things which will lend new dignity (a dignity never conceded in ancient Greece or in modern England hitherto) to the artist of the future.

The "audience" will consist mainly, of course, of parents—the parents of the little artists. Hitherto they have been asked to entertainments where everything was provided by strangers. They have paid, it may be, now and again, to go to a place of amusement; but even then they were face to face all the evening with people and things that were alien to them.

Now there is no barrier to be overcome; no sense of strangeness. They have come to be infected by the feelings expressed by artists; but these artists are their own children. How quickly and easily do they interpret this kind of expression, and how effectually it kindles in them those deep human emotions which they have almost forgotten, but which are not incapable of revival. Herbert Spencer has shown how the love of parents to their children is the beginning of social feeling, of altruism, of human development. But the redemptive agencies of the family do not end in the caresses and helpless appeals of infancy and the responses of the parent who provides sustenance, shelter, and protection. That is the beginning of all; but it is not the end of all. The parents' mission does not end there. Neither does the children's! To-day, indeed, they awaken little pride, they stir little feeling, save of a merely animal kind, in those to whom they owe their being. Their mission is not even acknowledged. Only a great soul here and there will suffer them to speak to it of a happier kingdom!

Yet the children's mission will yet be fulfilled. What the philanthropist and legislator could not do, *they* will succeed in doing. Where Governments failed they will not fail. The gin palace will yet find in them a powerful rival, and the low music hall may be emptied for their sake. Does this seem a wild prophecy? It will seem wild and impossible only to those who do not know the power of children in their own sphere of activity, their ready mastery of their true *rôle*.

There is ample excuse for the almost universal ignorance of the nature of this *rôle* and mission of children. The schools of pains and punishments in the long past threw little light on it. The cramming method of the past fifty years did not help to bring it to light. Even now it is only here and there in schools blessed by courageous masters or mistresses that a fragmentary success in one or

another art gives a hint of the whole truth of which these many separate triumphs are evidences. But already we know enough to proclaim with confidence the *nature* of the mission of children.

Dark places of the earth! foul dens of the great cities! strong hands have been put forth to lead out from you the unhappy ones who are sunk in you, as in a poisonous swamp. Perhaps, at last, the little hands of children will lead the submerged into the light of day. The upward impulse is born anew in every child; and the lowest have helpers that have long been overlooked.

"Ye are better," said Longfellow to the children, "than all the poems that ever were sung or said."

Perhaps, too, they are better than all the sermons that were ever preached, all the Government art that was ever offered, all the extraneous or alien help that was ever imposed. Dimly as yet, but with growing clearness, we see emerging the true Saviour. Weak, helpless, long overlooked, regarded hitherto as a mere recipient, the little figure of the coming Leader emerges.

It is a little child who will lead them.

For a list of previous ESSAYS, *and for information concerning Ethical Societies and their publications, apply to the Secretary of the Union of Ethical Societies,* MISS F. WINTERBOTTOM, *19, Buckingham Street, Strand, London, W.C.*

Issued for the UNION OF ETHICAL SOCIETIES, and printed by WATTS & Co., 17, Johnson's Court, Fleet Street, London, E.C.